

1	Jan Reinder Fijn, <i>Welcome to Maastricht. The outstretched hand: a symbol of peace</i> , 1944, Hahnemühle Photo Rag, 347mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
2	Natasha Fijn, <i>Burnt out shed, Plumwood Mountain</i> , 2020, Chromajet matte, 318mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
3	Jan Reinder Fijn, <i>A sad picture: the destroyed St Servatias Bridge</i> , 1944, Hahnemühle Photo Rag, 293mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
4	Natasha Fijn, <i>Stone cottage still intact after fire, Plumwood Mountain</i> , 2020, Chromajet matte, 318mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
5	Jan Reinder Fijn, <i>The twisted steel of destruction from a vantage point on the Wilhelmina Bridge</i> , 1944, Hahnemühle Photo Rag, 293mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
6	Natasha Fijn, <i>Burnt trees with water meadow beyond, Plumwood Mountain</i> , 2020, Chromajet matte, 336mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
7	Jan Reinder Fijn, <i>Long live our liberators! Arrival in Maastricht</i> , 1944, Hahnemühle Photo Rag, 293mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
8	Natasha Fijn, <i>Black poles still standing after fire, Plumwood Mountain</i> , 2020, Chromajet matte, 342mm x 417mm.	1/5	\$290
9	Jan Reinder Fijn, <i>Greetings when an American tank stops, Maastricht</i> , 1944, Hahnemühle Photo Rag, 293mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
10	Natasha Fijn, <i>Burnt out escarpment, Plumwood Mountain</i> , 2020, Chromajet matte, 318mm x 417mm.	1/5	\$290
11	Jan Reinder Fijn, <i>Smoke on the water, Maastricht</i> , 1944, Hahnemühle Photo Rag, 322mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
12	Natasha Fijn, <i>Sprouting fern after fire, Plumwood Mountain</i> , 2020, Chromajet matte, 320mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
13	Jan Reinder Fijn, <i>The old stone turret climbed by lines of troops, Maastricht</i> , 1944, Hahnemühle Photo Rag, 330mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
14	Natasha Fijn, <i>Burnt brown barrel, Plumwood Mountain</i> , 2020, Chromajet matte, 318mm x 417mm.	1/5	\$290
15	Jan Reinder Fijn, <i>Landing ships with Zeppelins against Stuka plane drops, Maastricht</i> , 1944, Hahnemühle Photo Rag, 286mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
16	Natasha Fijn, <i>Newly emerged snail after fire, Plumwood Mountain</i> , 2020, Chromajet matte, 347mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
17	Jan Reinder Fijn, <i>Greetings when an American tank stops, Maastricht</i> , 1944, Hahnemühle Photo Rag, 293mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
18	Jan Reinder Fijn, <i>The first Americans reach the remain of the Wilhelmina Bridge, Maastricht</i> , 1944, Hahnemühle Photo Rag, 258mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
19	Natasha Fijn, <i>Looking towards the light, Plumwood Mountain</i> , 2020, Chromajet matte, 352mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
20	Jan Reinder Fijn, <i>Destroyed factories along the Maas, Maastricht</i> , 1944, Hahnemühle Photo Rag, 357mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
21	Jan Reinder Fijn, <i>Peace at last, 14 September 1944, Maastricht</i> , Hahnemühle Photo Rag, 330mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290
22	Natasha Fijn, <i>Forest gully tree ferns Plumwood Mountain</i> , 2020, Chromajet matte, 318mm x 417mm	1/5	\$290

Huw Davies Gallery  
21st April - 21st May 2022

## Between Hope and Despair

### Natasha Fijn

*Between Hope and Despair* forms a juxtaposition between two photographic series, each documenting a place immediately after a time of crisis. Fijn contrasts her observations of temperate Australian forest recovering from the devastating 2020 bushfires with her grandfather's, Jan Reinder Fijn, record of the American liberation of Nazi-occupied Maastricht in 1945.

Natasha and Jan have both employed the art of critical, participant observation in the documentation of their respective landscapes. The two locations are separated by a time span of seventy-five years, but are connected by an intergenerational sense of urgency, through an acute attention to their surrounding environments.

### Being Still

For Natasha Fijn and Jan Reinder Fijn

Natasha Fijn and I first met early this century through the fellowship and scholarship of the late Deborah Rose. Plumwood mountain was one of her special places. Indeed, the late Val Plumwood, whose name it honours, was another member of our ecological humanities breakfast group where ideas and ethics and mutual support merged seamlessly. We, decades later, are now finding art that honours their thinking to resist and repair ourselves in new times of crisis.

Still photography stands out in the i-phone era, now everyone is making films. When news is delivered via podcasts, and on screens in "packages" of footage, designed to maximise impact in minimum time, the viewer is losing the chance to pace herself, to reflect, to engage creatively with the world. Art can step backwards from bombardment, from distractions and explosions, and be Still.

Reading is another still art-form. A book is a conversation between an author and a reader that crosses time – the author's time and the reader's time, taken as they choose, without intervention from outside parties whose business is to distract. Reading a book is the antithesis of doom-scrolling, of FOMO, of the despair of too much of everything. Hope lies in focus. In being centred.

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There is no certainty in the Anthropocene but there are many things that aggravate uncertainty, anxiety and a personal sense of paralysis.

An art gallery is a cathedral of culture: it offers calm, space and air to meditate with an artist. It is 'a training ground for possibility', making inequalities plain, and suggesting other ways of living, according to art-critic Olivia Laing.<sup>1</sup> In her pursuit of art that is concerned with 'resistance and repair', rather than aesthetics, Laing is seeking out new kind of time frame 'in which it might be possible both to feel and to think', 'to process the intense emotional impact of the news'. Perhaps even to imagine 'other ways of being'.<sup>2</sup>

Natasha Fijn is working here with her grandfather to slow the violence of fire-power, of war and horror, to slow down and acknowledge fully its pain. She is working her repairs with not just one timeframe but two. There is a dance between the war-torn world of her grandfather and the climate-changed world of Plumwood mountain. The viewer is invited to reflect in the space between them.

The liberation of Maastricht marks the beginning of the Great Acceleration of change. The Black Summer onslaught on Australian bush near Fijn's home is a later moment, when global warming and other Anthropocene changes have already exploded. Just one lifetime separates the two slices of time, what the Swedes call a mansålder, or three score years and ten, in the old biblical parlance. More has happened in this mansålder, geologically, ecologically and culturally, than in any other. The constant cadence of "unprecedented" events is deeply stressful. Disaster, horror and cruelties bombard our souls and paralyse life. We need to create time to absorb slow violence, to find a new ethics for uncertain times.

The more we learn about intergenerational trauma, the visitations of the pain of the generations of stolen children on their grandchildren, for example, the more important intergenerational art becomes. The still photography that was the only option for Fijn's grandfather, is a gift to this generation, literally driven mad with distractions. Fijn has adopted his art form to bring the moments together. Hope and despair are not the only options, but despair fosters paralysis, while hope nurtures focus, persistence and action. 'Hope is life's desire for more life. It is the loom on which fabric of life is woven', as Deborah Bird Rose puts it.<sup>3</sup>

I have written about Cabinets of Curiosity or "Wonder Rooms" (Wunderkammer), long held devices of museums, places that enable complex encounter between different times.<sup>4</sup> They can work as places of 'transformation not absorption' in Rose's parlance. Looking at crisis in other times and places is a way to heal present trauma.

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1 Olivia Laing Funny Weather: Art in an Emergency, London: Picador, 2020, p. 8.

2 Laing 2020 pp 2-3.

3 From Rose, Deborah Bird "Hope is the Way of the World" (2016 blog)

4 Robin, Libby 'Anthropocene Cabinets of Curiosity: Objects of Strange Change' in Gregg Mitman Rob Emmett and Marco Armiero (eds.) Future Remains: A Cabinet of Curiosities for the Anthropocene, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018, pp.205–18

Rose in her final years explored the concept of shimmer, something she learned from her Aboriginal teachers of the Victoria River region of Australia's Northern Territory. Shimmering can frame ideas that cross over between people and animals, between the living and the no-longer-living, between the present and the ancestors. Rose likens it to Isabelle Stengers' philosophical strategy of 'reciprocal capture', which enables 'new immanent modes of existence in which neither entity transcends the other, or forces the other to bow down'. Shimmer is itself a still art form. Perhaps it is a patina for intergenerational art forms, where 'different ways of being and doing find interesting things to do together'.<sup>5</sup> Fijn shimmers to create intergenerational art here.

**Libby Robin**

*Libby Robin works as an independent environmental historian with museums in Australia, Germany, Estonia and Norway. Her most recent book is The Environment: A History of the Idea.*

## **About | Natasha Fijn**

Dr Natasha Fijn is an ethnographic researcher and observational filmmaker based at the Australian National University's Mongolia Institute. She has conducted extensive field research in remote places, including the Khangai Mountains of Mongolia and Arnhem Land in northern Australia, focussing particularly on multispecies and sensory anthropology and more-than-human sociality. In combination with text, observational films and photo essays form an integral part of her creative research output. She is also a founding member of a conservation organisation, who act as stewards for the land on Plumwood Mountain, a unique bush property consisting of groves of ancient Plumwood trees and ferns, in keeping with an environmental philosophy focussing on the nurturing of both the nature and the culture of place.

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5 Rose, Deborah Bird. 'Shimmer: When All You Love Is Being Trashed.' In Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Heather Anne Swanson, Elaine Gan and Nils Bubandt (editors), Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene, Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 2017 pp.51-63, quotes p. 51.